
Research on the state of addiction

Addiction is a state of periodic or chronic intoxication, produced by the repeated consumption of a drug, which is harmful to the individual and to the society (Mahanta). Many people think addiction is a choice and that people are able to just stop using however, there's more to it than just that because addiction is a disease. In this paper, I am going to examine and explain what can cause addiction and how it affects the body and mind over time. I find this topic intriguing and am researching it further because I know many people that are or have been through a serious addiction and am curious to find out what it all boils down to.

Addiction can stem from several different areas; hereditary factors, peer pressure, anxiety, emotional disturbances, environmental stress, depression, unstable personality, recreation, too much gain, adverse social reactions, physical inability to do a job, curiosity, chronic pain from cancer etc. are some of the causes (Mahanta). Addiction can also stem from a negligent upbringing. Babies are dependant on their parents for everything they need in order to survive. They need to be nurtured and reassured that they are safe and being well taken care of. However, starting at infancy, if babies are punished or ignored when they are crying or in need, critical changes to the nervous system occur from a young age that are difficult to change (Pikiewicz). These children are forced into the mindset that they are problematic. This causes people to become depressed and have anxiety problems and makes it extremely difficult for them to open up and talk about problems that they may be facing because they revert back to their childhood patterns of being ignored or punished for seeking help. Instead of being able to express how they are feeling and seek help, they push their emotions away causing it to cage up inside of them which can lead to addiction as a way of coping and a feeling of normalcy. The euphoria caused by drinking or using drugs makes these people feel better and makes their problems seem insignificant. Instead of turning to people for help, these people turn to drugs and alcohol in order to ease their pain whether it be mental or physical.

Furthermore, addiction can be hereditary. Ghrelin is a hormone found in the body that plays a role in regulating the reward receptor in the brain and can correlate to developing addictions. Everyone has ghrelin in their bodies and when they have the normal amount, it acts to regulate appetite and regulates the use of energy throughout the body. However, when there is an excess of ghrelin in the body, which can be passed down genetically, problems can arise. People with larger quantities of ghrelin in the body become more dependant on substances because the substances interact with the levels of ghrelin and dopamine in their bodies and send out higher reward signals throughout their brain than normal (Zallar). This causes people to become reliant on these substances because the high levels of ghrelin in their bodies react with the substances creating a constant craving. If you know that there is a history of addiction in your family it is smart to stay away from substances because if you ignore the past and start using, history will just repeat itself again.

An addicted brain is different--physically different, chemically different--from a normal brain (Begley). Addictive drugs alter the brain's pleasure systems by blocking the molecules that absorb dopamine. This means that the dopamine has a free range causing a higher sense of euphoria for a longer period of time. Having sex or doing things that are enjoyable sends off dopamine throughout the brain but it is absorbed shortly after and wears off whereas with the

drugs it remains in the system for longer. Continuously doing this causes permanent changes to the way the brain works because it wipes out some of the dopamine receptors. Therefore, what would normally make someone happy and send off dopamine throughout the brain has less of an affect on addicts because their bodies are so used to a higher concentration of the dopamine resulting in dullness and depression. The lowered amount of dopamine receptors in the brain is what we call a building of tolerance. This makes users more likely to continue using and in greater quantities because their bodies are getting used to the drugs and it doesn't set off the dopamine levels as much as they did prior. Withdrawal is when an addict isn't able to get their fix and it causes serious side effects. Since the body is so used to having the drugs in its system, when it doesn't, the body becomes hypersensitive to pain because there is no flow of dopamine (Begley). Many addicts that aren't on drugs are depressed and even suicidal because it takes time for their brains to get back to normal and have their dopamine receptors functioning properly again. Many addicts also tend to go through relapses. Many times people will be sober for months to years and still something can come and push them over the edge and relapse. The brain still remembers the feelings of the drugs in your system and minor things can trigger people into relapsing.

Additionally, addiction leads to many health problems that can lead to death. Obviously, using drugs isn't going to lead to a healthy lifestyle however, chronic use leads to more problems. A lot of the time when someone gets clean, their body slowly starts to get back to normal. Thus, when someone relapses, their bodies aren't as used to the drugs as it used to be and many people don't consider that before using again and will use the same amount as they did when their body had built up tolerance. This leads to many deaths throughout the world because since the body is no longer used to having drugs in it's system, when a large amount is absorbed into the body many people overdose and can die. I personally know two people who have died from an overdose and it's sad that they were addicts in the first place but if they were able to think about the amounts they were using prior they could still very well be alive today and could be getting the help they desperately need. While on drugs, many people are stripped of their original self and become someone that their loved ones may not recognize. Many addicts steal and do immoral things in order to get their next fix which can ruin relationships and get them into problems with the law.

An article written in NCADD called Alcohol, Drugs and Crime claims, Alcohol and drugs are implicated in an estimated 80% of offenses leading to incarceration in the United States such as domestic violence, driving while intoxicated, property offenses, drug offenses, and public-order offenses. The use of drugs and alcohol impair peoples judgement and make them more willing to do illegal things than if they were sober. Also, being an addict is an extremely expensive habit and when addicts run out of money, their cravings become so intense that they will do just about anything in order to get another fix. It is difficult for someone that has gone through addiction to gain trust back from their friends and family because many times they have wronged the people they love the most many times. However, in going through the twelve steps, you must apologize to people and right your wrongs in any way you can. The people that truly care for you will see that you are making the strides for a better and sober life and will hopefully let you back into their lives and lend you guidance when you need it.

Seeing all of the negative aspects of addiction can be scary; however, there are ways to escape addiction. It is not a short or easy road but with patience and support, it's possible. The first step to getting your life back on track as an addict is being aware that you have a problem. Once you realize you have a problem, you need to want to fix it for yourself or nothing is going

to get done. Sobriety needs to happen out of your own will and determination because in the end, you are the one that is going to need to put in the work to become sober. In order to start a sober life you may need to go to rehab. It can be pricey but many take insurance and it is essential in becoming sober. Rehabs detox you from drugs by giving you a safe environment with medical assistance and sometimes necessary medication in order to rid your body of the drugs safely. Once you have detoxed from the drugs, you start working with a counselor that is there to talk you through issues you may be facing. The people you are with in rehab are all going through similar situations so many people find it easier to talk to them and the professionals that work there because they know what's going on first hand. After going through rehab, many people move on to live in sober livings where they are able to live with other sober people bettering their lives with the help of a house manager. Being with people going through the same thing as you is helpful because you can rely on each other to get through the difficult journey of sobriety. There are also support groups dedicated to helping addicts get their life back on track such as narcotics anonymous and alcoholics anonymous. These meetings are tremendously helpful to people trying to remain sober because its a huge support system where people share their success stories along with their struggles and everyone is there to help one another out. Sponsors are people that have been through the program and decide to lend a helping hand to a newcomer and help them work the twelve steps and stay sober. Going through these support groups greatly increase your chances at staying sober (DeLucia). Having support from people who know what you are going through along with your close friends and family is critical in living your best sober life.

Many scholars speak about similar things regarding addiction. Throughout my research, I have found that many of them realize that it is a disease and they prove this using several different scientific experiments. They also came to the same conclusion that sobriety, although difficult to achieve, can be done. Many aspects of addiction have been traced to the root using different testing and research. The book from this semester ties in a lot about the topic of addiction. For example, the issue of morality came up when addicts steal in order to support their addiction. Perceiving and believing are also relevant because it's the way that you look at the situation you are in and what you believe is the right thing to do in the end that make up someone's mind about how bad addiction is and trying to become sober. Emotive language is often brought up when speaking about addiction because of its serious nature. Many heartbreaking things occur within addiction and in order to express it fully, emotive language is used which may also guide people along the right path.

In conclusion, this research has taught me many things about a topic I thought I was more aware about. My best friend since childhood was addicted to meth for about a year when we were juniors in high school. She became very detached and I didn't know why until I found out what had been going on. Luckily her family sent her to rehab and she is now three and a half years sober and her and I are closer than ever. I attend meetings and conventions with her because I want to support her in every way I can. That being said, there was so much I still didn't know about addiction that my research taught me. I became aware of the aspects of addiction that change our brains wiring which I found really intriguing and how it affects the body as well. I am extremely grateful that there is so much that has been found in aiding sobriety and am glad to have learned more about it.